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SUBJECT: AZERBAIJAN: 2007 COUNTRY REPORT ON TERRORISM

REF: STATE 175925

11. Summary: Cooperation between Azerbaijan and the United States on counterterrorism predates the September 11, 2001 attacks and the first waiver of Section 907 of the FREEDOM Support Act in January 2002. Over the past five years, the GOAJ has continued to step up its efforts to combat terrorist financing, and has aggressively apprehended and tried members of suspected terrorist groups. It has rendered numerous terrorists and persons suspected of having ties to terrorists. It has also closed organizations operating in Azerbaijan, which were suspected of supporting terrorist groups. In 2007, Azerbaijan arrested three separate terrorist-associated groups, at least 39 persons total, on terrorism-related charges. The U.S. Embassy in Baku operated at limited staffing for two days in late October 2007 as a result of a terrorist threat from the Kamran Asadov group (detailed below). End Summary.

12. Proposed report for Azerbaijan in 2007 Patterns of Global Terrorism Report to Congress.

Azerbaijan and the United States have a very good record of cooperation on counterterrorism issues that predates the September 11, 2001 attacks. Azerbaijan assisted in the investigation of the 1998 East Africa Embassy bombings and has cooperated with the U.S. Embassy in Baku to counter terrorist threats against the mission. After the September 11 attacks, the Government of Azerbaijan expressed unqualified support for the United States and offered "whatever means necessary" to the U.S.-led counterterrorism coalition. Azerbaijan has granted blanket overflight clearance, engaged in information sharing and law-enforcement cooperation, and has approved numerous landings and refueling operations at its civilian airport in support of U.S. military operations in Afghanistan. Azerbaijan has supported peacekeeping operations in Iraq since August 2003 with an infantry company of approximately 150 soldiers stationed at the Haditha dam. A platoon of Azerbaijani soldiers has been working with the Turkish peacekeeping contingent in Afghanistan since November 2002, and President Aliyev announced plans to double this number to between 40 and 44 soldiers. Another platoon has been working with the Turkish peacekeeping contingent in Kosovo since 1999.

Azerbaijan has also provided strong political support to the United States in the Global War on Terrorism. With the 2005 ratification of the International Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism, Azerbaijan has acceded to all 13 United Nations Conventions on Terrorism. It has also joined 11 European conventions on combating terrorism. In 2003, the GOAJ implemented UN Security Council resolutions 1368, 1373 and 1377. In May 2005, the GOAJ joined the Convention of the Council of Europe on terrorism prevention. The government also approved changes to the criminal code that increased the maximum penalty for acts of terrorism from 15 years to life imprisonment and added a provision making the financing of terrorist activities a crime under Azerbaijani law.

While Azerbaijan has served as a route for international mujahedin with ties to terrorist organizations seeking to move people, money, and material through the Caucasus, Azerbaijan has stepped up its efforts and has had some success in reducing their presence and hampering their activities. Azerbaijan has taken steps to combat terrorist financing and identify possible terrorist-related funding by distributing lists of suspected terrorist groups and individuals to local banks. In May 2003, the GOAJ established an inter-ministerial experts group responsible for drafting anti-money laundering and counterterrorist finance legislation. In December 2006, the experts group, through the President's office, provided its most recent draft to the U.S. Department of Justice and the Council of Europe; the Department of Justice provided comments on the law and discussed it with GOAJ officials. The Government of Azerbaijan has not yet presented the draft law to parliament, nor has it taken steps to create a Financial Intelligence Unit. In anticipation of future adoption of this law, the U.S. Government has continued to train prosecutors, investigators and judges on implementing anti-money laundering and anti-terrorist financing law enforcement techniques.

In February 2007, Azerbaijani authorities arrested a group of 15 Azerbaijani citizens in Baku who called themselves the "Northern Mahdi Army." The group was charged with having ties to Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC). The group went to closed trial in October on charges of cooperation with a foreign intelligence service, high treason, possession of illegal weapons and robbery. According to the Azerbaijani Ministry of National Security (MNS), the group was organized to establish a state ruled by Shari'a (Islamic) law. According to published reports, the MNS said that one of the group members had met an IRGC officer in Qom, Iran, and was offered money to fight against the United States, Israel and other Western countries. According to published reports, the group received training in Iran and Azerbaijan.

During security sweeps in late October and early November a group of twelve Azerbaijanis, who were reportedly led by an ethnic Arab named Abu Jafar were arrested in Sumgayit, Azerbaijan, on terrorism-related charges. The MNS publicly said that members of the group came to Azerbaijan from various conflict zones and grouped around Abu Jafar. In the security operations, a large quantity of arms and ammunition, a map of Sumgayit, and other equipment was confiscated from members of the group. Criminal cases are pending.

Separately, in November 2007, 11 Azerbaijani citizens were arrested over a number of days throughout Azerbaijan in connection with a late October 2007 threat against the U.S. Embassy in Baku which resulted in the embassy working at limited staffing for two days. The group consisted of Azerbaijani citizens led by a renegade radicalized Azerbaijani army officer, Kamran Asadov, who went AWOL from his unit with four assault rifles, a machine gun, 20 grenades and a large amount of cartridges on 24 October. The group carried out an attack on a LUKoil gas station in Baku on October 30, likely to fund their operations. According to press reports, members of the groups told the MNS that they planned to attack the U.S. embassy. All the weapons and at large members of the group have been seized and criminal charges are pending.

There is no evidence in 2007 that terrorists find safe haven in Azerbaijan or that there is any terrorist group operating in Azerbaijan which meets the guidelines as defined for this report.

EMBASSY POINT OF CONTACT:

EMAIL: LEWISMW@STATE.GOV  
INTERNATIONAL LINE: 994124980335  
TIE LINE: 841-0000  
INTERNATIONAL FAX: 994124656671

TIE LINE FAX: 841-4289

ADDITIONAL POC

EMAIL: BENNETTJA@STATE.GOV  
DERSE